OWASIPPE HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

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Joan Fernandez

(Camp Shabbanau)

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Conducted by Thomas Nelson

18, April 2026

This interview was conducted on 18 April 2026 with Joan Fernandez of California. My name is Thomas Nelson. Mrs. Fernandez was born in 1932 in Chicago and is the youngest daughter of Norman Horwitz, a former Owasippe camper and founder of Camp Shabbanau. Camp Shabbanau was a private camp for Jewish youth which operated at Blue Lake Family Camp of Owasippe from 1932-1935 before being relocated to Wisconsin. Her son, Michael, is also present.

We're going to start with your father. What can you tell me about him? What was he like as a person?

Joan: My father was a Boy Scout from the time he was 12 years old, and he became an Eagle Scout, one of the few. And he was very into scouting, and that's what really started him into wanting to be a Boy Scout.

Michael: He earned a Silver Beaver.

Joan: Yes, he earned a Silver Beaver.

Do you know what year he roughly started scouting?

Joan: I have no idea.

Michael: What year was he born?

Joan: On that cup right up there, Michael, are the birth dates of all of us.

Michael: Which cup?

Joan: Where my pencils are in that, on the side. I have his birth date.

Okay. I think I might have it as well.

Michael: Oh, my God. I can't read it because it's so... Oh, my God. I had no idea, Mom.

I have it on my computer.

Joan: Oh, he has it, Michael.

Do you know how he became involved in scouting?

You know, I can't tell you any exact thing. I can only give you memories, you know? My dad was big on catching trucks in the street and riding on their back bumpers. He was really big on that when he was a kid. And he got into scouting because they lived on the west side of Chicago, and there was just really not anything that interested him that much. And so he joined the Boy Scouts, and that started him

on that whole road to scouting and into deciding to have a camp. And my sister and I grew up in the summers in those boys camps.

So he was a scout in Chicago. Do you know where he attended summer camp?

Oh, I'm sure he didn't attend summer camp other than maybe a week, whatever they did for scouting. They didn't have any money. He would never have been sent to camp.

If you know, do you know what inspired him to start his own camp?

Yes, because of his interest in scouting. I mean, it started out as a scout camp, and then it became a private camp. All of that started, all of that came out of his scouting experiences and the people that he, the adults that he related to that were involved in the camp.

This camp was called Camp Shabbanau?

That's correct.

And that's how you pronounce it? (SHAB-uh-naw)

That's correct.

Why do you think he felt it was important to start this camp at the time that he started it?

I have no idea because I wasn't born yet.

Okay, I wasn't sure if he mentioned it.

I was born in 1932. You know, I have no idea because all I know is that we as a family, my mother and my sister and I, went to camp every summer. And I grew up in the summers in boys camp and I learned to ride and shoot and do archery and all those things with boys until my sister and I got too old, as my father said, to be with boys. I guess I was about 12 before I was about 12, 12 before, before I went to girls camp.

Do you know how he came to choose the name Camp Shabbanau?

No, I don't. Okay. I was curious about that.

Do you recall if your father or your older sister talked about the camp and had any stories that you heard about it?

Oh, dear. I have no idea about that. You know, I'm 94. That's 90, you know, 85 years ago.

Yes, it was.

No, I, you know, I remember experiences that I had, but I can't talk about anybody else's. Because, you know, that doesn't have it. I have no memory of anything that anybody else said at that time.

Okay. So we'll go to your experience.

Yeah, that's all I can really relate to.

Okay, that's fine. What was a typical day in camp like at Shabbanau?

Joan: Well, my mother did a lot of the cooking, I can tell you that. And we had a mess hall where everybody ate, including my family. We all ate together, three meals a day.

Michael: How many people do you remember?

Joan: Do I remember how many kids were there?

Michael: Yes, Approximately.

Joan: I'm going to say 30, something in that. Something like maybe 30 kids. We probably had five cabins of boys and of course an H cabin. There were two adults that attended to them. And I don't remember how big that camp was. It seems, because I was so little, it seemed like it was really big and took a long time to get from one place to another. But there was a lake, and I learned to swim in that lake. And we had boats, canoes, and rowboats. And we had archery and riflery and horseback riding and swimming and then crafts and music.

Michael: What kind of crafts did you do? Do you remember?

Joan: Oh, yeah, sure. I learned how to make, you know, things for your wrist and lanyards. We did a lot of lanyards. Lanyards are big at camp. But, you know, We made things out of wood to burn at the campfires that we had every night. I remember that.

What kind of things?

You know, it didn't matter. We just glued pieces of wood together in different shapes and made them to throw into the campfires. You know, that sort of a game we sang every night we had a campfire every night and every night we sang camp songs.

Did Shabbanau have its own song?

I don't think that... I don't have that in my memory so I don't think so I really don't remember that.

So I read that there were at least two locations for the camp, one in Michigan, which is what I'm researching, and then Wisconsin.

Yes, yes, I do remember that we had two different ones.

Okay, do you recall the first one in Michigan, or can you differentiate between the two?
I know you would have been pretty young for that.

I cannot differentiate between them in my memory. You know what I'm saying? It's like I only remember the things that I did, but I don't remember if it was in one place or the other because both of them had similar things, you know, a lake and cabins and all that crafts and all that. So it's hard for me to remember which was which. No, it's impossible.

Right. Yeah. We were trying to figure out where the camp was at Owasippe, which is the camp I stayed at as a kid. And it seemed like you guys used an old hotel we had on the north side of one of our lakes. Do you recall a large structure..

No. No, I don't. Okay. You know that these were Jewish camps for Jewish boys. You do know that.

Yes.

Okay. Okay.

Was this restricted to male campers?

Yes. That's why my sister and I had to leave at one point when we got too big to be there.

Where were most of these campers from? Were they mainly Chicago?

Yes, yes.

So this is a private Jewish camp, correct?

Yes, that's correct.

And in what ways do you think that differentiated it from other camps?

How could I begin to tell you that? I didn't go to other camps. I mean, I went to girls camp after we were restricted from being at boys camp. My sister and I went. We were sent to girls camps.

Okay. Were there religious observances?

No, no.

I believe you said your mother helped cook with the camp. Did she have any other roles?

I don't think so that I remember, you know, I don't think so. We had a separate house. My mom and father and Janice and I, we had our own house on the grounds. But my mother did help with the cooking. I remember that.

What was her name?

Celia, C-E-L-I-A, Celia Danielle Horowitz.

Do you recall, I know, again, you were young, do you recall why the camp moved to Wisconsin?

I have no idea. It probably had something to do with the fact of how much it costs to rent the space or, you know, I don't know. I have no, can't really tell you. I don't remember. I'm stopping a moment just to think, to see what comes to my mind. I can't really recall what... Something happened, but I don't know what it... I know that something happened, but I don't really know what it was.

And then later on, I found an article saying that your father sold the property in Wisconsin. Do you know why that was?

I don't know, and I don't remember that.

I think it was around the time he moved to Arizona after, correct?

Yes, that's right, to Tucson. They bought a guest ranch.

Do you know why he chose to move out there? What made your father move to Arizona?

Well, because my uncles, Louie and Alvin, my father's brothers, used to go to this guest ranch every year, and they loved it. And my parents started joining them, so the three boys and their wives. And then they took my sister and I, and then they decided that we all loved it so much, they just bought it, and we moved there. But because they had been going to that place, and it came up for sale, and my dad bought it.

Do you know who Michael Horowitz is?

That's my grandfather. He had two brothers, Louis and Alvin. My father had two brothers. Okay. Because I think that Alvin's name is on one, something that I was looking at yesterday that you had sent. I think both of my uncle's names must have been on some lease or something. Something. I'm not sure what that was, but I saw both their names on it. Those are my father's brothers.

Okay. And then the other guy listed was Rue Miller. He was a ranger at Owasippe.

I have no idea. I don't remember that person. Yeah.

So that's helpful to know who they are. That was 1935.

Joan: Mike, that's my grandfather.

Michael: What was your grandmother's name?

Joan: Just a second. Lena.

Did they also participate at Shabbanau? Were they staff members?

No. But they came and visited, but no, they didn't participate.

After your father moved to Arizona, did he consider reopening the camp over there as well?

No, no. He was done with that.

Do you know why?

Sure, because he was old.

How old was he at that time?

I don't remember. I don't even know what year we moved. I was 16. So what's 32 and 16? 1948.

In your father's later years, did any former campers or staff continue to reach out to him or ever contact him?

Chicago, I'm not sure that once we were in Tucson that he had that much contact, but the years from when he closed the camp until we moved away, he did have contact with a lot with some of the boys and some of the men that were had been counselors, but I couldn't give you any names.

What do you think the camp meant to the people who attended it, the campers?

I think they loved it because mostly it was repeat boys that came back year after year.

And what impact did the camp have on you and your sister's life?

Well, we sure learned a lot of things. We learned how to shoot a rifle and do archery and ride horses and learned how to swim and all those things that the boys learned, we learned them too. So it did have that kind of an effect on me.

So it was a Jewish camp, let me think of how to phrase it.

It was a Jewish camp that we, my father reached out to temples and things early to, you know, find boys to go to camp. I'm not, I started out with this Boy Scout thing. That's what, that's what I think

participants, participants, That's what I think got him started in having a boys camp all his years in scouting.

Yeah. I saw that he was active. We have an organization called the ordered arrow. I saw he was in that and I believe he continued in the ordered arrow in Arizona.

No, no, he didn't.

Okay. Then I don't know where I got that from, but yeah. On the Jewish aspect, was there significance why it was restricted to Jewish campers?

I think it was because that's where he found the boys. Because back then, there was a lot of anti-Semitism when I was growing up. And, which is coming back, which I'm so thrilled about. And I think that that was part of it. It was safe. Yeah.

I was thinking, because right around that time in the 1930s, the Nazi party was active.

That's right.

So I wasn't sure if that anti-semitism was the reason behind the need for a Jewish Camp.

You know, I don't know, because I was too young. I mean, when the Second World War started, I was nine years old. So you can imagine how young my sister and I were during all of that. So I can't tell you because I wasn't affected until I was old enough to go out and play on the street, you know. When I got affected.

How much older was your sister than you?

Two and a half years.

Okay. And then I think the final question I have written down is, it's more broad, is if there's anything else you would like to share for us to get a better understanding of the camp in any way.

I think that everybody just seemed to love it. And the camp that, and, you know, I mean, people came back, the same counselors came year after year after year. I mean, you know, the same people, the same adult people that kind of raised my sister and I in the summertime, played with us, came year after year. So there, and the boy, a lot of the boys came back here after a year. Things were really different back then, you know? And there was nothing, there wasn't a lot to do in the summer when you were young. We lived in a different world.

Right. I thought it was interesting. I have one article from, I don't remember what year this is from, but it showed there was about 70 campers and they had a decent amount of staff for that small amount of campers. Like, I think it said 20 people helping operate the camp.

Joan: Oh, yes. It was big. I mean, I remember that because we ate in the mess hall and there were really a lot of kids. But I couldn't tell you how many. I had no idea about that. Okay, that's fine.

Michael: A few years back, I was looking and I found a Camp Shabbanu pin.

Joan: Can you hear, Michael?

Yes, I did. That's cool. I would love a photo of it.

Michael: Yeah, I bought it and now I don't know where it is, but I will find it. But yeah, and it was an actual pin.

Joan: Do you want to send it to them or send them a picture?

Michael: I have to find it. No, I have to find it to take a picture of it. Okay. But if you look on eBay, I think there's some things there.

Okay. I guess piggybacking off of that, was there anything like patches or stuff that the scouts could, or not the scouts, the campers could earn do you remember?

No, I don't remember. I don't. I have a vague picture but I don't know whether I should attach it to boys camp or girls camp. I mean you have to remember I was young and that's a long time ago.

Right, when I try to think back to when I was five or so at camp, it's hard to differentiate anything. And that was 20, 22 years ago.

Joan: It gets mixed up with every, you know, with other, you know, it's hard to sort it out. I mean, I can picture with my eyes closed, I can picture myself learning how to shoot arrows. I mean, I can see if with my eyes closed, that big, funny, circular thing that we just shoot into.

Michael: Target.

Joan: Target. Thank you. I'm having a little, at my age, you know, remembering words is sometimes difficult. But considering that I'm 94, I'm not doing bad.

No, You sound pretty good.

What else can I tell you?

Did they have uniforms?

Oh, no. Okay. Raggedy shorts. Nobody wore anything on top. People ran around in shorts. I don't think that they wore tops. I don't remember that. I mean, I remember bare arms and shoulders and stuff of all the boys.

And did any of the other staff members bring their families with them, like your father did?

No.

Okay. So it was just you and your sister and then?

And my mom.

So no other females? Your mother was the only adult female?

Yes.

That you recall?

Well, no. We had a nurse. There was a nurse. I just remembered that. There was always a nurse in the camp.

I saw you also had a psychologist, which was interesting for the time as well.

Joan: Mm-hmm, yeah. I don't remember that, but I'm sure you're right. But I do remember we had a nurse because I remember my mom, I remember her. I don't remember her, but I remember another female and it was a nurse. And there was a separate little building that had, was like a little, had a couple of cots and, you know, in case anybody got sick. There was a place to take them out of the cabins with the other boys and put them with the nurse. Yeah. I do remember that.

Michael: Fantastic.

Joan: So when you ask me questions, it helps me to remember things, you know?

Other people were interested in what the program was like for the camp.

Joan: Mm-hmm. So... Well, you know, we had everything.

Michael: Was there any educational component? Well...

Joan: No, not really. It was fun. It was fun. It was, you know, you didn't go to school in the summer and you went to camp and you had fun and you learned things. You learned how to swim and ride horses. You learned life and how to get along, because my dad didn't allow any fighting. There was never. No, no, no. That was definitely not allowed. And there were no knives or guns. I mean, we had rifles, but that was to teach people how to shoot. But, you know, there was nothing allowed there.